

'Framing internet safety: the governance of youth online'[Review] Nathan Fisk (2016) Framing internet safety

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BOOK REVIEW

Framing Internet Safety: The Governance of Youth Online, by Nathan W. Fisk, Cambridge MA., MIT Press, 2016, 223 pp., \$35 (hardback), ISBN 9780262035156

The arrival of the internet in homes during the early 1990s generated new public concerns about youth internet safety in the US and other Western countries. In public debates involving politicians, the media, teachers and parents, internet safety became a discursive vessel for a constantly evolving set of concerns about the ‘risk’ that online technologies may pose to young people. It has also played a key role in producing new forms of technological governance and surveillance aimed at directing or controlling how young people use the internet as part of their daily lives. Approaching the topic from a North American context, Nathan Fisk’s *Framing Internet Safety* proposes “a project of reverse engineering” that aims to trace “the various mechanisms and lines of power that constitute youth internet safety discourses [...] from the large-scale policy narratives down to the everyday lives of children, teenagers and adults” (p.3). The book proposes that there is a pressing need to critically examine internet safety as a site of expertise and governance and to do so from multiple scales and perspectives across the network of interlinked actors and agencies involved in shaping and negotiating youth internet use as a site of concern.

This multi-stranded approach is reflected in the structure of the book which moves in a scalar fashion from ‘macro’ strategies of policy, pedagogy and research to the ‘micro’ tactics of young people, parents and teachers. This enables the book to progressively trace the “lines of capillary power” (p.13) of internet governance from the level of legislation, policy making (chapter 3) and surveillance technologies (chapter 4), through to institutional levels of the school (chapter 5) and family (chapter 6), before finally arriving at everyday experiences of young people (chapter 7). Across the book’s chapters, Fisk employs a ‘cartographic’ framework influenced

by the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to map how power is enacted around internet safety and the ways in which young people's internet use has become a site of adult surveillance and governance. Fisk particularly draws on Deleuze's concept of the 'highway' as a method of control apparatus, noting parallels with the popular metaphor of the internet as an 'information highway'. Fisk returns to this metaphor several times during the book to illustrate how 'experts' of internet safety have used the allegory of the highway to attempt to reduce the complexity of the internet and to make it more 'governable'. The book is also influenced by French sociologist/historian Jacques Donzelot, who Fisk draws on to demonstrate the longer historical precedents of surveillance as a method of controlled freedom in children's lives.

In the first substantive chapter of the book 'Predators and Proposals' (chapter 2) Fisk outlines the ethical complexities involved in researching children's internet safety, and how US research ethics regulations framed his study as ethically sensitive and 'risky'. The following chapter, 'Figuring Youth and the Internet' (chapter 3), identifies the main public arenas in which governance of youth and the internet have been debated in the US – primarily by the media and federal government. This discussion provides a useful genealogy of 'generational' concerns, moving from youth hackers in the 1980s, to adult sexual predators in the 1990s, before finally concluding with cyberbullying in the 2000s. In 'Pedagogies of Surveillance' (chapter 4) the book looks at how internet safety strategies have counter-posed the 'untrustworthy' child and the 'responsible' adult. The primary focus of this chapter is the growth of technological solutions marketed to parents and schools – a discussion which is particularly relevant in the US context but possibly less so in other Western countries. This is followed up in 'Cyberbullies and Cybercitizens' (chapter 5) which explores the role of the e-safety curricula in schools. Here the book identifies a key shift in the disciplinary apparatus of internet safety, which Fisk claims is moving from a governance model of panoptic monitoring to one of 'empowering' young people to manage online risks for themselves. In 'Parents, Non-parents and School Admin'

(chapter 6) the book turns to the role of adults as ‘agents of surveillance’ in young people’s lives. Here Fisk examines attempts by parents and school staff to balance responsibility for internet safety with respect for youth privacy and autonomy. Finally, in ‘Kid’s, Drama and Internet Safety’ (chapter 7) the book focuses on youth perspectives on internet safety. Here Fisk demonstrates how young people frequently adopt the adult language of ‘risk’, but are also largely dismissive of internet safety advice as ‘common sense’. In this chapter and, throughout the book, Fisk identifies a disconnect between the sensationalising rhetoric of internet safety and the everyday online experiences of young people and those adults seeking to support them.

In the concluding chapter (chapter 8) Fisk highlights some neglected aspects of internet safety debates. One of the most significant of these is young people’s cybersecurity and questions about the protection of personal data. He notes that whilst cybersecurity has become a concern for governments and large corporations (seeking to avoid hacks and leaks), the cybersecurity of young people (and individual citizens more generally) is rarely debated. Though teenagers and adults in Fisk’s study expressed ethical concerns about everyday breeches of privacy, such as parents snooping on a child’s Facebook messages, it was rare to find anxieties about data being harvested and shared by corporations. In this final section of the book, Fisk provides a useful roadmap for broadening the terms of public debate about internet safety and the forms of governance it is concerned with. However, the book sounds a word of caution in its closing remarks, suggesting that internet safety discussions have progressively narrowed over the last couple of decades and that there may now be limited opportunities for critical debate about the purpose and scope of internet safety.

Framing Internet Safety is a highly pertinent and timely account of how young people’s internet safety has evolved as a site of concern and governance over the last three decades. It adds to a growing international body of research that has critically examined new modes of disciplinary apparatus seeking to safeguard young people from online ‘risks’. This international body of

internet safety research tends not to be very visible in the book and there were moments (such as chapter 4's discussion of monitoring technologies) where the idiosyncrasies of the US context could have been brought more to the fore to highlight key differences. Nonetheless, the book's scope is impressive and Fisk provides a strongly nuanced account of the broad range of social, political and technological actors involved in shaping the governance of young people's everyday online lives.

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